



LLOYD EYER (1885-1951)

“I love a parade.” Most people do, but this could have been Lloyd Eyer’s theme song. For many years during the first half of the twentieth century, no organization in Bloomington/Normal ever thought of putting on a parade without Lloyd Eyer. He organized and directed over sixty parades through the streets of town. The most outstanding parade was possibly the Centennial Parade of McLean County held on August 28, 1930.

This parade was three miles long, and consisted of one hundred floats, many representing the small towns of the surrounding area. Others portrayed the history and politics of McLean County. There were five bands and a drum and bugle corps, cars, oxcarts and fire engines. The procession lasted two hours. Eyer himself provided some unplanned entertainment for the crowd. He had chosen a motorcycle sidecar as the vehicle from which to direct the parade and keep all in order. When he saw part of the parade starting to “tangle,” he had the motorcycle in which he was riding make a sharp reverse turn.. When it accidentally threw him out of the sidecar, he made a surprise aerial summersault and landed unhurt, able to go on with the parade. He commented, “People are harder to manage than floats. You get them lined up, turn around for a second...and the first thing you know, they’re all over the place.”

Lloyd Eyer was born on December 14, 1885, in Darlington, Indiana. The next year, Lloyd, his parents and three siblings moved to Bloomington the next year where he would live the rest of his life. In 1902, when he was sixteen, Eyer began his working life as a carrier for the Bloomington *Pantagraph*. In June of that year, a cyclone hit town causing a great deal of damage. Despite difficulties caused by the storm, Eyer delivered 334 papers that morning, and was cited by the paper for his loyalty and determination.

Eyer’s career was mainly devoted to “physical culture” and the “achievement of useful and healthy bodies.” He first coached gymnastic classes at the YMCA which was then located on north Main Street. By 1905, just twenty years old, he was named physical director of the “Y.” The growing popularity of the “Y” programs was largely attributed to his efforts.

On August 25, 1910, Lloyd Eyer married Josephine Rae Armstrong at the First Methodist Episcopal Church in Bloomington. Today, this church is known as Wesley United Methodist Church. Prior to their marriage, Josephine was a teacher at Franklin School for six years. The Eyers' had three children: Harold, Lois and Howard.

In 1917, Eyer went to work for W.B. Read and Co. At the time, this business sold books, stationary, and school supplies. After becoming the manager, Eyer expanded this business to include sporting goods. Today it is known as Read's Sporting Goods. In 1948, Eyer retired from Read's due to health concerns.

Beyond his professional life, Lloyd Eyer had a deep devotion to his community and involvement in its development. *The Pantagraph* reported that "any record of any public event or private project with public significance ...has Lloyd Eyer's name and his personality indelibly scrolled upon it." He was one of the original eight members who founded the Young Men's Club, a service organization which continues to meet every Tuesday at noon today. He served as its Secretary-Treasurer. He was responsible for organizing various high school and intercollegiate basketball tournaments. He was the founder of the Community Baseball League and secretary of the Illinois Tennis Association. He was responsible for the formation of the YMCA Circus and directed it for four winter performances. This is the forerunner of today's Gamma Phi Circus.

Eyer served on the board of Wesley Methodist Church and was church school secretary for 20 years. He was a Mason, a member of the Board of Education for six years, president of the Corn Belt Boy Scout Council and secretary of the Illinois Athletic Officials Association. He was responsible for organizing the first Boy Scout troop in Bloomington/Normal. And he organized parades!

In 1931, the year following McLean County's great Centennial Parade, Eyer was awarded *The Pantagraph's* Community Service Award as the most deserving recipient for his role "in providing good, sound, wholesome recreation" for Bloomington. The award was to recognize the citizen "who performed the most meritorious public service to the community."

In 1947, Eyer for the first time had to witness the annual Thanksgiving parade from the sidelines. A heart attack caused him to withdraw from his many activities. Four years later, this heart condition took his life and he passed away on September 23, 1951. As remembered by *The Pantagraph*, besides his immediate family, "he left behind an entire community of people on which he affected a permanent impact." For "the measure of unselfish community service done with a stroke of genius, Lloyd Eyer deserves a place at the top of Bloomington's great men." He is buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

Discussion Question: What lasting effects of Eyer's life still exist today? What is Community Service?